

Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington D.C. 20054

March 11, 1999

In the Matter of
Telephone Service for
Indians on Reservations

CC Docket No. DA 99-201

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99-11

Comments of the North Dakota Public Service Commission

On January 21, 1999, the Federal Communications Commission released a Notice, DA 99-201, setting dates for several public hearings and requesting comments on the steps necessary to give all Native Americans on tribal lands the opportunity to obtain telephone service at affordable rates.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission (NDPSC) applauds the FCC in this endeavor and provides comments concerning its findings about the implementation of Link-Up and Lifeline Programs in North Dakota, in particular to Native Americans on tribal lands.

The NDPSC has worked closely with the ND Department of Human Services because the programs that qualify people for Link-Up and Lifeline Programs are administered through their County Social Service Offices. We developed the enclosed brochure to be available through these offices. When a person goes to a County Social Service Office and becomes eligible for TEEM, Food Stamps, Energy Assistance, or Medicaid, the ND Department of Human Services sends a Qualifying Certificate within a month to that person. The Qualifying Certificate has instructions to complete the form and send it to the telephone company listed in order to begin receiving benefits. In February of each year, all persons still qualifying for the above programs receive a new Qualifying Certificate.

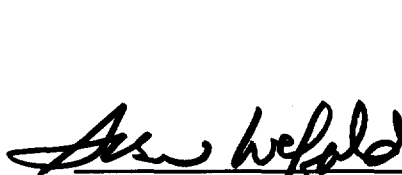
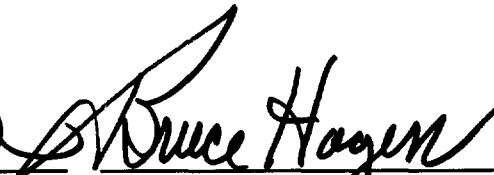
It was discovered that many Native Americans are not using the County Social Service Offices to qualify because they are receiving assistance through the tribal administered Low Income Housing Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Coordinators and Legal Assistance Services on their Reservations. In November 1998 (letter attached) we contacted these offices, the tribal chairmen, and the telephone companies serving Native Americans on tribal lands to meet with us. Our goals were to share more information about Link-Up and Lifeline benefits and to find the best ways to encourage Native American participation in these programs.

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List A B C D E

A meeting that resulted outlines a plan that makes an optional first contact point the Tribal LIHEAP Office on the Devils Lake Sioux Reservation (McKay letter 1/27/99 attached). The LIHEAP office will make the telephone companies aware of those people eligible for discounts. Each February new lists will be generated to update those eligible for participation. During the year, new applicants will need the LIHEAP coordinator or legal assistance office to call the telephone company to verify eligibility and initiate start of benefits.

In summary, the NDPSC has found that the Link-Up and Lifeline programs can be tailored to meet the administrative process at Reservations, and the local telephone companies are willing and able to accommodate these special circumstances.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

		
Susan E. Wefald Commissioner	Bruce Hagen President	Leo M. Reinbold Commissioner



Public Service Commission

State of North Dakota

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Executive Secretary
Jon H. Mielke

January 27, 1999

Marcie McKay, Acting Director
Senior Services
PO Box 359
Fort Totten, ND 58335-0359

Dear Marcie:

We certainly enjoyed our visit on Tuesday. Thank you so much for inviting Pat Fahn and I to your elders meeting. It was so helpful to meet with you regarding the details of getting people signed up for Lifeline and Link Up.

This letter will review our understanding of the "plan." If this is different than your understanding, please let us know.

1. The first week of February 1999 you will send a list of names, addresses, social security numbers, and phone numbers of all the people who are qualified for energy assistance since the fall of 1998 to Kathy Young, Business Office Supervisor, at the North Dakota Telephone Company (NDTC). The list will be divided into 2 parts. One part will be those who already have phone service. This list will include those peoples' names, addresses, social security numbers, and phones numbers.

The second list will be those who qualify for energy assistance but who do not have a phone. This list will include names, addresses, and social security numbers.

2. Each year in early February you will send a list of those people who are on the energy assistance program to the NDTC. This will enable the phone company to review their list to remove those people who are no longer eligible for energy assistance and add those people who are new.
3. The Lifeline and Link Up Programs are available to all age groups who are eligible for energy assistance.

Lifeline and Linkup
Marcie McKay
January 27, 1999
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4. With this direct reporting plan to the NDTC, you do not need any eligibility certificates. Therefore, we are not enclosing a sample copy.
5. We are sending a copy of this letter to the NDTC so that everyone involved will have a chance to review the plan.
6. We understand that the NDTC will review the lists forwarded by you in February. We believe that the NDTC will start applying discounts as soon as possible to eligible participants' bills.
7. Those people who do not have phone service, but want phone service, should contact the NDTC (701-568-3331) to discuss the Link Up and Lifeline Programs. If a customer is not on your February list, they should talk to you so you can call the company and verify their eligibility before they go in and arrange for telephone service.
8. Please call Pat Fahn (701-328-2400) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Wefald", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Susan E. Wefald
Commissioner

cc: Dave Dircks, General Manager
North Dakota Telephone Company



Public Service Commission
State of North Dakota

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COMMISSIONERS

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Executive Secretary
Jon H. Mielke

November 4, 1998

**Tribal Chairman
Eligible telecommunications carriers serving Indian Reservations
LIHEAP offices serving Indian Reservations
Legal Assistance Groups serving Indian Reservations**

RE: Lifeline/Link Up Telephone Service

Dear :

One of the goals of the North Dakota Public Service Commission is that as many North Dakota consumers as possible be connected to the telephone system. The ND PSC has adopted two programs to help. The first program, called Link Up, provides a reduction in a telephone company's charge for linking up a customer to a telephone company's system. The second program, called Lifeline, is retail local telephone service for which a qualifying low-income consumer pays a reduced monthly charge. These programs are described in more detail in the Commission's order adopting those plans, a copy of which is enclosed.

Recent statistics indicate that only a small percentage of households on Reservations who qualify for these programs are taking advantage of the opportunity. Perhaps they are not aware of the programs or are not aware that they qualify. Others who knew about these programs in the past may not be aware that the programs have been changed, making it easier in some instances for a household to renew telephone service.

In order to provide information about the programs and learn more about ways the Commission can help households obtain or renew telephone service, the Commission would like to hold a meeting with the Tribes, the Low Income Housing Energy Assistance Program coordinators, and the local telephone companies. We would like to do this sometime in January. We ask that the Tribal Chairperson please respond with suggestions for a meeting date and location. Please respond by November 20 so we can contact others who would be participating.

For your use, we have enclosed a copy of an information form for Link Up and Lifeline. Feel free to copy this form for anyone who may qualify and encourage them to

apply to their local telephone company for telephone service under these programs. The local telephone company will confirm the eligibility of the applicant with the LIHEAP coordinator for the Tribe. We have also enclosed a copy of the Commission's rules concerning consumer rights when telephone service is disconnected for non-payment.

If you have any questions, feel free to call.

Sincerely,

Bruce Hagen
Commissioner

Leo M. Reinbold
President

Susan E. Wefald
Commissioner

Enclosures

LINK UP AND LIFELINE PROGRAMS

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FOOD STAMP PROGRAM



HOME TELEPHONE ASSISTANCE

Link Up and Lifeline help eligible people pay **PART** of their telephone costs.

LINK UP

- ◆ Will save you 50% of the initial charges to hook up primary telephone service, or \$30, whichever is less.
- ◆ Your telephone company may defer payment on the balance and waive interest.
- ◆ You may qualify for service without a deposit. Ask your local telephone company.

LIFELINE

- ◆ Can save you at least \$5.25 on your monthly phone bill for primary local telephone service.
- ◆ Applies only to primary local telephone service in the home where you live.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Anyone qualified under one of the four major economic assistance programs: **TEEM (AFDC), Food Stamps, Energy Assistance, Medicaid.**

HOW TO OBTAIN THE TELEPHONE SERVICES

- ◆ When you qualify for TEEM, Food Stamps, Energy Assistance, or Medicaid through your county social services office you will *automatically* receive a Qualifying Certificate within a month by mail.
- ◆ Provide the Qualifying Certificate to your local telephone company.
- ◆ **OR** some individuals may need to **contact the Reservation Tribal LIHEAP Coordinator** to determine the application process.

WHAT IF MY BENEFITS STOP?

If you no longer qualify for any economic program, you no longer qualify for Link Up or Lifeline.

MORE INFORMATION

- ◆ For more information on *Link Up and Lifeline*, call your local telephone company.
- ◆ For questions on *eligibility*, call your county social services office or Tribal LIHEAP Coordinator.
- ◆ For *other questions*, call the North Dakota Public Service Commission in Bismarck, ND.